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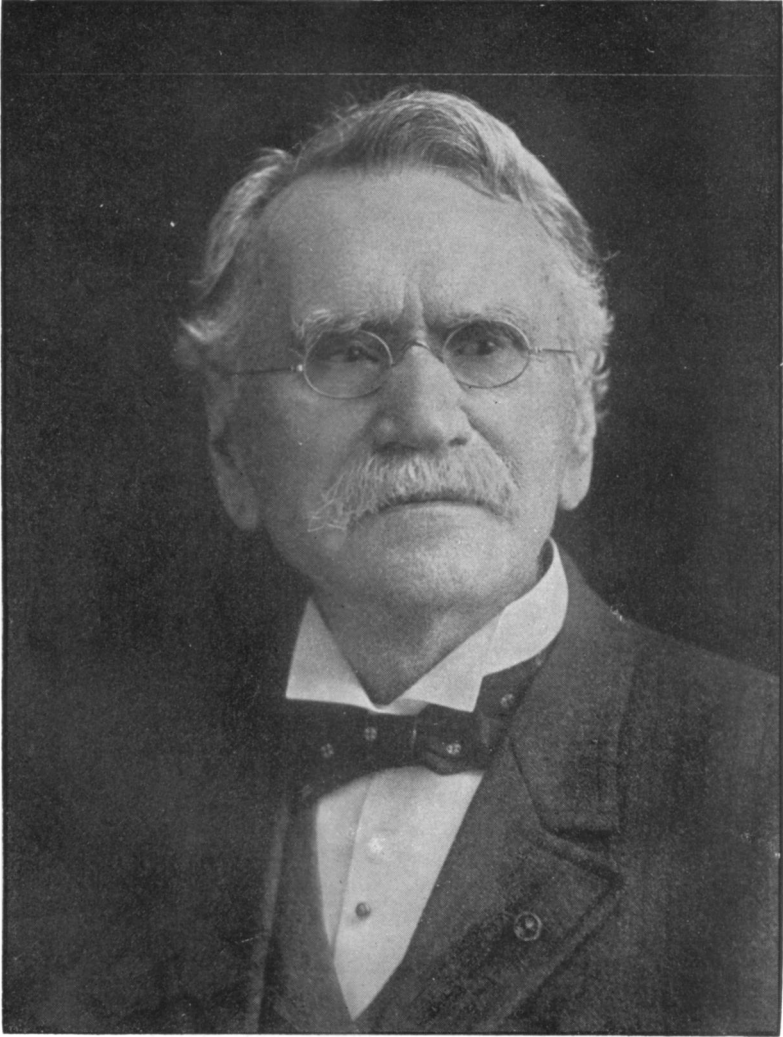
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THOMAS J. HENDERSON.

LIFE AND SERVICES OF GENERAL THOMAS J. HENDERSON.

By J. W. Templeton.

No more fitting place for a biographical sketch of General Thomas J. Henderson could be found than in the pages of the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society.

For more than sixty years he had been in some capacity connected with the making of the history of the State and of the nation, and in every capacity in which he had been called to the service of the State or nation, his labors were characterized by efficiency, faithfulness and unswerving integrity.

General Henderson was a native of Tennessee. He was born November 29, 1824, and was a son of Colonel William H. Henderson and Sarah M. Henderson.

William H Henderson, his father, was born in Garrard county, Kentucky, November 16, 1793, and there spent his boyhood and youth. At the age of nineteen years he enlisted in Col. Richard M. Johnson's regiment of mounted riflemen, and served during the war of 1812. Having studied surveying, for some years he followed that profession in his native state, and in 1823 removed to Tennessee, locating in Stewart county. There he also engaged in surveying, and also filled a number of offices of honor and trust. He served as sheriff of his county, and later, when he removed to Haywood county, was elected to the state senate, which position he resigned in 1836, to remove to Illinois. He was the first register of deeds of Haywood county, in which Brownsville is lo-

cated, and there recorded the first deed the same year in which Thomas J. Henderson, his son, was born.

On coming to Illinois, William H. Henderson located in Putnam county, now Stark county, on a farm, but his business tact and abilities were soon recognized by the people, and two years after his arrival he was elected a member of the Legislature, in 1838, and in the winter of 1838-39 met with that body in its last session at Vandalia, and where he was associated with Lincoln, Edwards and other notable men. He also served in the first session of the Legislature meeting at Springfield, in the winter of 1840-41. While a member of that body he was instrumental in the creation and organization of Stark county. In 1842 he was a candidate on the Whig ticket for Lieutenant Governor, but was defeated. In 1845 he moved to Johnson county, Iowa, where he purchased and operated a large farm. His death occurred January 27, 1864, at the age of seventy-one years.

The boyhood of General Henderson was spent in his native state, and until eleven years of age he attended the common schools and the male academy at Brownsville, Tenn., and during the last year commenced the study of law. With his father's family he went to Stark county, where he attended the pioneer schools of that locality. Nine years later he again went with the family to Johnson county, Iowa, where he entered the State University at Iowa City and spent one term. Prior to this, however, he had taught country schools more than a year. On leaving the university he returned to Stark county, and taught the first term of school in a building just erected for that purpose at Toulon. He then clerked in a store for nearly a year, and in the fall of 1847 was elected clerk of the county commissioner's court of Stark county, and served as such until the office was changed to that of clerk of the county court, to which office he was elected and served until 1853. While discharging the duties of these offices, which were not very arduous at

that time, he continued his law studies, and in 1852 passed an examination and was admitted to practice. On the expiration of his term as clerk, in 1853, he opened an office in Toulon and commenced the practice of his chosen profession.

In those days law and politics seemed to go hand in hand, and in 1854 Mr. Henderson was elected a member of the Illinois Legislature and served in that capacity a term of two years. In 1856 he was elected to the State Senate and at that time was the youngest member of that body. Those were exciting times. The Whig party had ceased to exist, and the newly organized Republican party had sprung into existence. As an anti-Nebraska man, Gen. Henderson was elected to the House, but as a Republican he was later elected to the Senate. The celebrated Kansas-Nebraska act had been passed. The southern states were attempting to force slavery upon the newly organized territories, and the North, much against its will, was forced to recognize the great power wielded by the South, and the fact that that section was determined to have its way regardless of consequences. In this political fight General Henderson entered heart and soul.

The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 furnished the pretext for the southern states to carry out their threats. Secession acts were passed and the war for the preservation of the Union was begun. In almost every school house in Stark county, General Henderson addressed his fellow citizens, urging enlistments and pleading with all to stand by the administration and the Union.

In the summer of 1862, when the call came for 300,000 more, Mr. Henderson determined to enlist, and at once took the field and soon succeeded in raising a company, which became a part of the One Hundred and Twelfth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Assembling in camp, by permission of Governor Yates, the regiment was permitted to elect its colonel, and Mr. Henderson re-

ceived the unanimous vote for the office. On the 22nd of September, 1862, the regiment was mustered into service and immediately ordered to the front. Its record for nearly three years following is a part of the history of that great struggle. In the campaigns through Georgia and Tennessee, the One Hundred and Twelfth was ever at the front, its colonel winning the good will of his superior officers for his conscientious discharge of every duty devolving upon him. "Always hopeful, always prompt, always courageous, a most loyal subordinate, and a most able and devoted leader," was the record given him by Major General J. D. Cox, under whom he long served. At the battle of Resaca, Georgia, May 14, 1864, he was severely wounded and lay in a hospital for some time, after which he was granted a furlough and came home to recuperate. Returning to his regiment, the Third Brigade, Third Division, Twenty-third Army Corps, was organized for him, and he was assigned to its command. As commander of this brigade, he served until the close of the war, being brevetted a brigadier general for gallant conduct during the campaign in Georgia and Tennessee, and especially at the battle of Franklin, Tennessee, the commission dating November 30, 1864.

The war over, the regiment being mustered out of service, General Henderson returned to his home in Toulon, Stark county, and quietly resumed the practice of law. There he remained until March, 1867, when he moved to Princeton and formed a partnership with the late Joseph I. Taylor in the practice of his profession, which was continued until 1871. At this time the General was appointed by President Grant as United States collector of internal revenue for the fifth Illinois district, with headquarters at Peoria. During the two years he was connected with that office he collected and turned over to the general government more than nine million dollars.

In 1868, General Henderson was one of the presidential electors for the state at large, and cast his vote for Gen-

eral Grant. In 1870, he unsuccessfully sought the nomination for Congress, and in 1874 was nominated and elected a member of the Forty-fourth Congress from the sixth district. During that term he served on the railways, canals and pension committees; in the Forty-fifth Congress he served on claims; in the Forty-sixth, on commerce; in the Forty-seventh he was chairman of the committee on military affairs; in the Forty-eighth, Forty-ninth and Fiftieth Congresses he served on the committee on rivers and harbors; in the Fifty-first he was chairman of the committee on rivers and harbors; and in the Fifty-second and Fifty-third he served on rivers and harbors, and also on banking and currency. For eight years he served as a member from the sixth district and for twelve years from the seventh. After each term he was renominated by acclamation. In all General Henderson served the people faithfully and well for twenty years. His greatest service as a member of Congress, as he regarded it, was rendered as a member of the committees on commerce and on rivers and harbors, in the improvement of the waterways of the country, and his principal achievement was the securing of the construction of the Hennepin canal, and this is a movement of which he may well be proud. A man more honest and devoted to the best interests of his constituents never entered the halls of Congress, and those that knew him best do not hesitate to say that he was in every respect a noble type of American manhood. For twenty years he was one of the most popular of the soldier statesmen in Congress, and his name stands for honesty, integrity and everything that is good in politics and public life. No man in Bureau county in the past twenty years has stood nearer the hearts of the people.

General Henderson was one of the last of the civil war statesmen, who knew and enjoyed the friendship and confidence of Lincoln. In the early days of his long political career, he was intimately associated with the future

president and while a member of the Illinois Legislature, before the breaking out of the war, he was privileged to do many favors for Lincoln, including a loyal support of his candidacy for the United States Senate in 1854.

In the later years of his life, when the incidents of those stirring days preceding and during the civil war had become invested with the glory which history weaves about the worthy deeds of men, the General entertained a just pride in his association with the men and affairs of the war times, and his most treasured possessions were those which were linked with the hallowed memory of Lincoln and the war. Among these was a series of letters written to him and to his father, William H. Henderson, by Lincoln, referring to Lincoln's candidacy for the senatorship and the faithful allegiance accorded him by the Princeton statesman. Most of the letters are still preserved in the family records of the Henderson family, two of which are reproduced together with this article.

LINCOLN LETTERS.

One of the Lincoln letters carefully preserved by General Henderson, is one in which Lincoln solicited his vote when a candidate for the office of United State Senator, in 1854. At that time General Henderson was a member of the Illinois Legislature. The letter is as follows:

“Springfield, Ill., Nov. 27, 1854.

“T. J. Henderson, Esq.

“My Dear Sir:—It has come around that a Whig may, by possibility, be elected to the United States Senate and I want the chance of being the man. You are a member of the Legislature and have a vote to give. Think it over and see whether you can do better than to go for me.

“Write me at all events and let this be confidential.

“Yours truly,

“A. LINCOLN.”

Springfield, Ill. Feb. 21. 1855
Hon. W. H. Henderson.

My dear Sir:

Your letter of the 4th covering a lot of old deeds was received a few days ago - Milton says he has the ones but can not lay his hand upon it easily, and can not take time to make a thorough search, until he shall have gone to & returned from Chicago - So I lay the paper by, and wait -

The election is over, the Session is ended, and I am ~~not~~ Senator. I have to content myself with the honor of having been the first choice of a large majority of the fifteen members who finally made the election - My larger number of friends had to persuade the smaller number, in order to prevent the action of Matrons, which would have been a Douglas victory, I started with 44 votes & T. with 5 - It was rather hard for the 44 to have to surrender to the 5. And a less good humored man than I, perhaps, would not have consented to it - and it would not have been done without my consent - I could not, however, let the whole political result go to ruin, on a point merely personal to myself -

Your son kindly and firmly stood by me from first to last, and for which he has my everlasting gratitude -

Your friend & son
A. Lincoln

The following letter was written by Lincoln to General Henderson's father and tells of the loyal support given him by the General in his candidacy for the Senatorship:

"Springfield, Ill., Feb. 21, 1855.

"Hon. W. H. Henderson,

"My Dear Sir:—Your letter of the 4th, covering a lot of old deeds was received only two days ago. Welton says he has the order but can not lay his hand upon it easily and can not take time to make a thorough search until he shall have gone to and returned from Chicago. So I lay the papers by and wait.

"The election is over, the session is ended and I am not Senator. I have to content myself with the honor of having been the first choice of a large majority of the fifty-one members who finally made the election. My larger number of friends had to surrender to Trumbull's smaller number, in order to prevent the election of Matteson, which would have been a Douglas victory. I started with 44 votes & T. with 5. It is rather hard for the 44 to have to surrender to the 5 and a less good humored man than I. perhaps, would not have consented to it,—and it would not have been done without my consent. I could not, however, let the whole political result go to swan, on a point merely personal to myself.

"Your son kindly and firmly stood by me from first to last and for which he has my everlasting gratitude.

"Your friend as ever,

"A. LINCOLN."

General Henderson was invited by the Lincoln Club of Newark, N. J., to deliver an address at a banquet in celebration of Lincoln's birthday, 1911, and before being taken sick had began the preparation of an address for the occasion. The manuscript copy of the speech was afterwards found in a pocket of his overcoat, and like a message from the grave it was read at the banquet.

A part of this address is given here as of great historic value.

“But it was my good fortune, Mr. President, to begin my political life under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, and to have been somewhat actively and I may say, intimately associated with him, first, as a Whig, and then as a Republican, in the politics of Illinois, from my early manhood until he was elected President of the United States in 1860.

“I have here tonight a letter, in his own handwriting, written to me December 12, 1847, from Washington, when he was a member of Congress and I was but 23 years of age.

“In this letter, he says: ‘It is my intention to snatch a moment now and then, to send documents to some friends, out of my district, among whom I shall place Captain Butler and yourself.’

“It was my good fortune, I have always thought, to have known Abraham Lincoln, personally, from my boyhood. I well remember the day and the occasion, when I saw him for the first time. It was in the month of June, 1840, at an immense Whig mass convention, held in Springfield, Ill., where Mr. Lincoln then resided, during the presidential campaign of that year, when General William Henry Harrison was the Whig candidate for President and Martin VanBuren the Democratic candidate.

“This convention brought together an immense gathering of the Whigs, and especially of the leading prominent Whigs, from all points of the State, from Chicago to Cairo, and from the Wabash river to the Mississippi. They came by delegations, in wagons, and in carriages, on horseback and on foot. They came with music and with banners. They brought log cabins, built on wheels, and drawn by oxen, from long distances, with a barrel on one end of the cabin marked, ‘Hard Cider,’ and with coon skins nailed on the logs. It was called the ‘Log Cabin

Hard Cider and Coon Skin Campaign' as an opprobrium, by the Democrats.

"That, I think, was the first political convention I ever saw, and my father, who had served in the war of 1812 under General Harrison, took me and a younger brother with him; and the delegation that went from the county, in which he lived, to attend it. My father, like Mr. Lincoln, was born in Kentucky, and like Mr. Lincoln, was a Clay Whig. They were then both of them representatives in our State Legislature, and warm personal friends, and my father introduced me to Mr. Lincoln, who gave me a very cordial and kind greeting, and at that great political assemblage was the first time I ever saw Abraham Lincoln.

"There were many leading, prominent Whig speakers of Illinois, able and eloquent speakers, who were present at that great mass convention; among them were S. Lyle Smith, of Chicago, said to have been one of the most eloquent speakers in the State; Edward D. Baker and Abraham Lincoln, of Springfield; Rev. John Hogan, I think of Alton; John J. Hardin, of Jacksonville; Ben Bond, of Carlyle, and Fletcher Webster, a son of Daniel Webster, then quite a young man, living at Peru. I heard all of these men I have named, speak at that convention, and while I was too young, of course, to judge of the ability of these speakers, or the merit of the speeches, delivered by them, the impressions made upon my mind from what was said of them by my father and others were, that all of them, even Fletcher Webster, who was then a young man and not accustomed to public speaking, and had to be urged to speak, made able and interesting speeches, and many of them great speeches.

'Mr. Lincoln was not then so prominent as a speaker as some of the others, especially S. Lyle Smith, Edward D. Baker and John J. Hardin, who were noted for their ability and eloquence as speakers, but he was among the foremost, and was rapidly coming to the front, as a man

of ability and as a speaker of great force. In fact six months before this great mass convention was held in December, 1839, Mr. Lincoln had participated in a political discussion in the hall of the House of Representatives at Springfield, Ill., with such men as Stephen A. Douglas, Josiah Lamborn and others, Mr. Lamborn was either then or had been, as I remember, attorney general of the State, and was a very able lawyer.

“This was not a joint political debate. Individual speakers made political speeches on the political issues of the campaign, just opening, on different days. Stephen A. Douglas made the first speech on one day; then Josiah Lamborn followed Mr. Douglas on another day and made the second speech, both speeches on the Democratic side. And then on another day, Abraham Lincoln made a speech on the Whig side, replying to Mr. Douglas and Mr. Lamborn, which was of so much ability and force that when the Legislature met, the Whig members had the speech printed in pamphlet form as a campaign document, and when my father came home from Springfield he brought a number of copies of the speech with him, and attracted as I was, by the eloquent peroration of Mr. Lincoln’s speech, although but a boy, I preserved a copy of the speech and committed the peroration to memory. And I recited it in a speech which I made at a ratification meeting in Kewanee, Ill., either on the day of Mr. Lincoln’s nomination for President of the United States, in 1860, or on the day following his nomination. Some years ago I brought with me to Washington City the copy of this old speech, which I had preserved and still keep, and at his request, I permitted John G. Nicolay to copy and publish it in one of the last volumes of his and John Hay’s life of Lincoln.

“If I had not preserved this pamphlet copy of Mr. Lincoln’s speech, when a boy, I have good reason to believe the speech would have been lost, for a few years ago at the request of some friends, I had a reprint of the

speech made by Gibson & Sons, in Washington, and presented a copy of it to John Hay, then Secretary of State of the United States, and when I did so, I asked him the question, whether he or John Nicolay in their researches for material for the life and speeches of Abraham Lincoln, had found any other copy of the speech than the one I permitted them to copy and publish, and he said, no, they never found any other copy.

“I have a copy of the reprint of this speech here, and shall take pleasure in presenting it to the president of your club, and any of the members who may wish to examine it, will, I believe, find it to be an able, argumentative and logical speech, showing great familiarity with public affairs, and with the political issues of the presidential campaign in 1840, and discussing them with great ability and clearness, and the speech was, as I think, a full and complete answer to the speeches of Mr. Douglas and Mr. Lamborn, and Mr. Lincoln was not then thirty-one years of age.

“I have not time this evening to comment on the ability of this speech as I would be glad to do, but as I have alluded to the closing part of the speech, will quote what he said, and in his own language. He said:

“ ‘Mr. Lamborn insists that the difference between the VanBuren party and the Whigs is, that although the former sometimes err in practice they are always correct in principle, whereas the latter are always wrong in principle, and the better to impress this proposition, he uses a figurative expression in these words, ‘The Democrats are vulnerable in the heel, but they are sound in the head and the heart.’ The first branch of the figure, that is, that the Democrats are vulnerable in the heel, I admit is not merely figuratively but literally true. Who that looks but for a moment at their Swarthouts, their Prices, their Harringtons, and their hundreds of others, scampering away with the public money to Texas, to Europe, and to every spot of the earth, where a villian may hope to find

refuge from justice can at all doubt that they are most distressingly affected in their heels, with a species of 'running itch.'

" 'It seems that this malady of their heels operates on these sound headed and honest-hearted creatures, very much like the cork leg in the comic song did on its owner, which, when he had once got started on it, the more he tried to stop it, the more it would run away. At the hazard of wearing this point threadbare, I will relate an anecdote, which seems too strikingly in point to be omitted. A witty Irish soldier, who was always boasting of his bravery, when no danger was near, but who invariably retreated without orders at the first charge of an engagement, being asked by his captain why he did so, replied, 'Captain, I have as brave a heart as Julius Caesar ever had, but somehow or other, whenever danger approaches, my cowardly legs will run away with it.' So with Mr. Lamborn's party, they take the public money into their hand for the most laudable purposes that wise heads and honest hearts can dictate, but before they can possibly get it out again, their rascally 'vulnerable heels' will run away with them.

" 'Seriously, this proposition of Mr. Lamborn's is nothing more or less than a request that his party may be tried by their profession, instead of their practices. Perhaps no position that the party assumes is more liable to or more deserving of exposure than this very modest request, and nothing but the unwarrantable length to which I have already extended these remarks, forbids me now attempting to expose it, for the reason given, I pass it by.

" 'I shall advert to but one more point.'

" 'And then follows the peroration which attracted my attention, and led me, as a boy, but sixteen years of age, to preserve a copy of this great speech, which I did, and thus prevented it from being lost.

“ ‘Mr. Lamborn refers to the late elections in the states, and from their results confidently predicts that every state in the Union will vote for Mr. VanBuren at the next presidential election. Address that argument to cowards and to knaves; with the free and the brave it will effect nothing. It may be true; if it must, let it. Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers, but if she shall, be it my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her. I know that the great volcano at Washington, aroused and directed by the evil spirit that reigns there, is belching forth the laws of political corruption in a current broad and deep, which is sweeping with frightful velocity over the whole length and breadth of the land, bidding fair to leave unscathed no given spot, or living thing, while on its bosom are riding like demons on the waves of hell, the imps of that evil spirit, and fiendishly taunting all those who dare resist its destroying course, with the hopelessness of their effort, and knowing this I can not deny that all may be swept away. Broken by it, I, too, may be; bow to it, I never will. The probability that we may fall in the struggle, ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just; it shall not deter me. If ever I feel the soul within me elevate and expand to those dimensions, not wholly unworthy of its Almighty Architect, it is when I contemplate the cause of my country, deserted by all the world beside, and I standing up boldly and alone and hurling defiance at her victorious oppressor. Here without contemplating consequences before High Heaven, and in the face of the world, I swear eternal fidelity to the just cause, as I deem it, of the land, of my life, my liberty and my love. And who that thinks with me will not fearlessly adopt the oath that I take? Let none falter, who thinks he is right, and we may succeed. But if after all we shall fail, be it so. We still shall have the proud consolation of saying to our consciences, and to the departed shades of our country's

freedom, that the cause approved of our judgment, and adored of our hearts, in disaster, in chains in torture, in death, we never faltered in defending.'

"I doubt if a more eloquent outburst of pure, exalted patriotism, love of one's own land and country, and devotion to duty and to principle was ever uttered by any other man in all the world's history. And was not this love of country, this devotion to duty and to principle exhibited in all the acts of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, in his heroic and patriotic efforts to maintain and preserve the government of his country, and suppress the rebellion and that from the very day of his election until his assassination, it seems so to me, he never faltered, he never wavered for one moment in his duty, 'that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.'

"But to refer again for a moment to the Whig mass convention held in Springfield, Ill., in June, 1840, it had seemed to me rather a remarkable incident that four of the distinguished Whig speakers, whom I have mentioned as making speeches at that convention, and whose speeches I heard as a boy should afterwards have been killed in war, when in the service of their country. John J. Hardin, who had been a member of Congress and who was colonel of an Illinois regiment, in the war with Mexico, was killed when in command of his regiment at the battle of Buena Vista, Edward D. Baker, who also had been a member of Congress and a colonel of an Illinois regiment in the war with Mexico, and at the time of his death was a United States Senator from the state of Oregon, and also a general in the Union army, was killed at Ball's Bluff in the state of Virginia during the civil war; Fletcher Webster, son of Daniel Webster, who had gone back to his native state, Massachusetts, was killed at the head of his regiment at the second battle of Bull Run. in the civil war. And Abraham Lincoln, whose name and fame are now immortal and imperishable, was assas-

minated in April, 1865, when President of the United States, just as the measure of his fame seemed full, and peace was dawning upon our war stricken land, and the preservation of the Union for which he had labored and struggled, and given all strength of his masterly ability, seemed well assured."

General Henderson was taken ill while in Washington in attendance upon a meeting of the Board of Ordnance, of which he was a member, and died at the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Farnsworth, Sunday, February 5, 1911. His remains were brought to Princeton, Ill., for burial.

Some of the soldiers of his old regiment, the 112th Illinois; some of those who had been his devoted followers during his active political career; some of the few surviving pioneer residents of Stark, Henry, Putnam and Bureau counties gathered at his last resting place and sorrowfully paid their last tribute to one who as a soldier, as a statesman or as a citizen was worthy of the salutation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."